

PMX reshuffle for a second term

Anwar is seizing the moment in the most sweeping mid-term Cabinet reshuffle that any prime minister has ever done.

THERE has been such a whirlpool of opinions about the Cabinet reshuffle, and almost everyone had something to say about it because it was such a sweeping shake-up.

"I have seen many reshuffles but this is the most extensive Cabinet reshuffle carried out by any of our prime ministers," said Umno supreme council member Datuk Seri Mohd Sharkar Shamudin.

Amid the usual arguments about why this and not that or who gained and who lost, there was, however, a general sense of agreement that the changes were necessary and timely.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim finally has a Cabinet that is more of his own design as opposed to the team he hurriedly glued together after the general election when he was at the mercy of parties that he needed to form the government.

"He seized the moment to make changes. It was quite bold and it shows he is aware of what we are saying about him and his government. He definitely has his eye on a second term," said a medical doctor from Penang.

It is rare to see ministers dropped mid-term and most of the time they are moved around the room like old furniture.

"Anwar knows the game. The ship is sailing on and he moved the crew around while a few were thrown overboard.

"Several of the changes were strategic and aimed at stabilising



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the ship and keeping a balance among the key players," said an aide to a Johor leader.

It is understood that Anwar put a lot of thought into the PKR team to bring up and several of those promoted were alerted days before the reshuffle.

The crushing losses in the Sabah election and the exit of his former deputy president Datuk Seri Rafizi Ramli had demoralised and destabilised his party.

Bringing up new and younger faces that included those associated with Rafizi was a strategic move to inject fresh energy and to dilute the influence that Rafizi wields from the outside.

"Giving the millennials a place in the government reflects the changing demographics and the fact that eight out of 10 young voters voted Perikatan Nasional," said lawyer and political commentator Ivanpal S. Grewal.

Umno politician Ainul Aizat Ahmad Ishak said the appointment of Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani to helm the Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry was

an "inspired decision" that sits well with industry players on account of his reputation as someone whose mind is like a databank of economic statistics.

But being capable is not always an advantage in politics.

Johari once joked to his mother that people in Umno said he was too smart and advised him to act stupid.

His mother was not amused, stared at him and said: "I brought you up to be clever and now you tell me you have to act stupid?"

The Umno leadership has realised that someone like him must be utilised to the fullest for the sake of the country and party.

"It strengthens Umno's position and reaffirms its role as the central Malay arm in the government. Overall, it was a reshuffle of necessity and to let those who make the most noise deliver," said Ivanpal.

Many political analysts concluded that DAP was cut down to size in the reshuffle, pointing to how the party's rising star Steven Sim was moved from the Human Resources Ministry to the Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives Ministry while Deputy Minister Lim Hui Ying was shuttled from Finance Ministry to Women, Family and Community Development Ministry.

They were labelled "Lalamove politicians" on social media because both were also moved in the earlier reshuffle.

Public opinion did not like that

Fadhlina Sidek remained as Education Minister and there was also a Malay uproar over Hannah Yeoh's move to the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories). Despite efforts at wearing the selendang and breaking fast at Muslim places of worship, she has failed to win the trust of the Malays.

The Federal Territories Ministry controls the hub of the country but the minister will probably realise that the mayor is one of the most powerful civil servants in the government and carries more clout than the minister. The ministry deals with big money, immense development pressure and powerful businessmen with connections to the very top.

Some politicians call it *lubuk duit* (a pond of money) given the endless demands for permits, licences and development approvals. And at the other end lies the urban underclass with their demands for affordable housing and jobs.

Yeoh was like a fish out of water as Youth and Sports Minister and the logic of appointing her to such a complex ministry is not apparent.

No less than the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister had to defend her appointment in what might turn out to be a poisoned chalice.

Is this the Prime Minister's way of allowing DAP leaders to prove themselves with their urban base? Is he telling them, "your party talks so much, let's see you

do it"?

They say a week is a long time in politics but the next two years may not be enough time for the unity government to deliver their promises, Anwar is likely to scale back on his international schedule and focus on domestic affairs.

He is aware of the labels thrown at him - PM Gaza and PM Antarabangsa (international prime minister) - to name a few.

He gave his reshuffled team some sound advice: Listen, resolve issues and be courteous.

Those in the know say that the general election may be sooner than expected in order to merge with the expiration of the Melaka and Johor state assemblies.

Parliamentary elections are not due till the end of 2027 but the Melaka state assembly will end in November 2026 and the Johor state assembly in March 2027.

"Pakatan (Harapan) leaders have learnt from the Sabah experience. The Chinese may decide to teach them a lesson if the Melaka and Johor state elections go first," said the above aide to a Johor leader.

Anwar's popularity was based on his promises for reforms, and a second term as Prime Minister is tied to delivering those promises and perhaps, more importantly, on whether he can maintain the political alignments of strange bedfellows that put him up there in his first term.

The views expressed here are entirely the writer's own.